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UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000142

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM SOCI PREL PGOV VM HUMANR RELFREE

SUBJECT: AMENESTIED PRISONERS RETURN HOME; MENNONITE PASTOR  
REJECTS EARLY RELEASE

REF: A) HANOI 254; B) HANOI 249; C) HCMC 106; D) 04 HCMC 1422

1. (SBU) Summary. ConGen HCMC has confirmed that amnestied prisoners Nguyen Van Ly (Father Ly), Nguyen Dan Que (Dr. Que), Nguyen Dinh Huy, Truong Van Duc, and Huynh Van Ba (aka Thich Thien Minh or Thich Thien Tu) were released from prison as part of the 2005 Tet Amnesty (Refs A, B). Imprisoned Mennonite pastor Nguyen Hong Quang reportedly refused a GVN offer of early release for himself and amnesty for two other associates, including the mentally ill Le Thi Hong Lien (Refs C, D). End Summary.

AMNESTIED PRISONERS RELEASED

2. (SBU) Post has confirmed that five prisoners on the USG list of persons of concern were released from prison this week as a part of the 2005 Tet Amnesty, including the high profile cases of Dr. Nguyen Dan Que and Father Nguyen Van Ly. Dr. Que's spouse, Nguyen Thi Mai, told us he returned to his home in HCMC on the morning of February 3, after traveling by train from Thanh Hoa province in northern Vietnam. According to his wife, Dr. Que must register with police within seven days of release but will have "complete freedom."

3. (SBU) Father Ly's nephew told us Father Ly was released from prison on February 1 and is currently in Hanoi. He has already called on the Archbishop's office in Hanoi and will be returning to his home in Hue on February 5. He plans to travel to HCMC to visit family after the Tet holiday.

4. (SBU) According to Nguyen Dinh Huy's wife, Huy returned to his home in HCMC on February 2. Huy, age 73, is currently in good health and feels well, although his wife said he had been ill several times while in prison. He has been receiving visitors and expects his Amcit daughter to visit soon.

5. (SBU) According to Le Quang Liem (strictly protect), leader of the unrecognized Hoa Hao Central Buddhist Church of Vietnam (HHCBC), Truong Van Duc returned to his home in An Giang province on February 1. He was released unconditionally and has "total freedom," said Liem. Duc has been able to receive visitors and plans to travel to Dong Thap province on February 12 where he plans to meet Liem and other HHCBC followers.

6. (SBU) Huynh Van Ba, a monk from the unrecognized Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), was released from prison on February 2 in HCMC. On February 3, he gave an interview to Radio Free Asia in which he called on the GVN to rebuild a UBCV pagoda in Bac Lieu that was confiscated and destroyed after 1975. During the interview, he said he intends to travel to his brother's home in Bac Lieu province before returning to HCMC to meet UBCV Secretary General Thich Quang Do and seek medical treatment.

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MENNONITE PASTOR QUANG REFUSES EARLY RELEASE, AMNESTY OFFER

7. (SBU) Ms. Le Thi Phu Dung (strictly protect), wife of imprisoned Mennonite pastor Nguyen Hong Quang, told us her husband is appealing his November 12 conviction (Ref D). The first hearing of his appeal, originally scheduled for February 5, has been postponed until after the Tet holiday. According to Dung, the authorities offered to reduce Quang's prison sentence and release two of his associates as part of the 2005 Tet Amnesty -- including Ms. Le Thi Hong Lien, who was arrested with Quang in March 2004 and subsequently suffered a mental breakdown (Ref C) -- if he would drop his appeal. Quang refused the offer and will proceed with the appeal, said Dung. Le Thi Hong Lien remains in prison.

WINNICK